

doors were being opened and a new chapter in the civil rights history of America was being written, and I hope we can do more and do better.

But I'm very grateful for having had the chance to do this, and I have said many times I wish we could have done more, but I'm glad we did what we did. And I feel very fortunate just to have had the chance to serve at this moment, thanks in no small measure because of the progress we've made on these issues, and I thank you for that, too.

Thank you very much.

NOTE: The President spoke at 12:55 p.m. in the Colonial Room at the Mayflower Hotel. In his remarks, he referred to luncheon cochairs Peter Amstein, software developer, Microsoft Corporation; Mark Fox, finance strategy adviser, FOX Group; Charles Nolan, fashion designer; Ellen Tracy, Inc.; and Andy Tobias, treasurer, Democratic National Campaign Committee, who introduced the President. The President also referred to ENDA, the proposed "Employment and Non-Discrimination Act."

Remarks Following Discussions With Prime Minister Barak of Israel and Foreign Minister al-Shara of Syria

December 16, 1999

Middle East Peace Process

Over the past 48 hours, Israel and Syria have taken a critical step in the journey toward peace. That journey will be a difficult one, but with courage and perseverance on both sides, the result will be deeply rewarding to the people of Israel and to the people of Syria.

In the course of their meetings with Secretary Albright and with me, Prime Minister Barak and Foreign Minister Shara agreed to make every effort to reach peace between Israel and Syria as part of a just, lasting, and comprehensive Middle East peace, based on United Nations resolutions 242 and 338, and the Madrid terms of reference. To that end, the Prime Minister and the Foreign Minister agreed to return to Washington to continue their negotiations on an intensive basis beginning January 3, 2000, about 2 weeks from now.

They have requested the United States to participate in these negotiations, and we are honored to do so. They agreed to take steps to ensure that these negotiations will be conducted in a productive and positive atmosphere.

We are witnessing a new beginning in the effort to achieve a comprehensive peace in the Middle East. With Syrian-Israeli negotiations off to a good start, Israeli-Lebanese negotiations expected to begin soon, and the Palestinian track well underway, we can truly set our sights on a new and different Middle East.

As I emphasized from the outset, the journey will be tough. Nothing in the past 48 hours should lead us to believe otherwise. But the parties are embarked on this path. They have agreed there should be no looking back, for the sake of our generations and generations yet to come.

I thank the Prime Minister and his team. I thank Foreign Minister Shara and his team. I thank Secretary Albright and those on the American team. All of them have worked hard. And I want Israel and Syria to know they can count on the United States every step of the way.

Thank you very much.

NOTE: The President spoke at 3:40 p.m. in the West Portico at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Prime Minister Ehud Barak of Israel and Foreign Minister Farouk al-Shara of Syria.

Proclamation 7261—55th Anniversary of the Battle of the Bulge

December 16, 1999

By the President of the United States of America

A Proclamation

By the winter of 1944, the United States and our Allies had turned the tide of the Second World War. Allied forces had liberated

the Italian peninsula and were gaining ground in France and the Low Countries. In mid-December, in a desperate attempt to halt this steady advance, Adolf Hitler launched a furious and massive counteroffensive. On December 16, 29 German divisions flooded the Allied line in the Ardennes Forest region of Belgium and Luxembourg. The Battle of the Bulge had begun.

Facing superior enemy numbers, rugged terrain, and bitter weather, the American troops at first fell back. But their determination to defeat the Nazis never wavered. For 6 weeks, U.S. soldiers responded to fierce German offensives with equally determined counterattacks, refusing to succumb to the Nazi onslaught. The siege of Bastogne in Belgium remains an enduring symbol of their indomitable spirit. At that strategic crossroads, a small detachment of the 101st Airborne Division and other attached troops were encircled. When called upon to surrender by the much larger German force, Brigadier General Anthony McAuliffe dismissed the demand with his legendary one-word reply: "Nuts." Against all odds, he and his men held firm during the siege until reinforcements arrived and helped halt the German offensive at a critical point in the Battle.

Inevitably, the spirit, toughness, valor, and resolve of the U.S. forces led to victory. By late January of 1945, the American and Allied counterattack had succeeded in pushing back the Nazi forces, eliminating the threat of further German offensives and ultimately sealing the fate of the Nazi regime. But this victory was costly. At the end of the Battle of the Bulge, some 19,000 Americans lay dead, and thousands more were wounded, captured, or missing in action.

Now, more than half a century later, we still stand in awe of the courage and sacrifice of the more than 600,000 U.S. soldiers and airmen who fought that epic battle. These seemingly ordinary Americans achieved extraordinary things. Leaving their homes, their families, and their civilian lives behind them, they stepped forward to wage a cru-

sade for freedom. They laid the foundations of the peace and security we enjoy today and planted the seeds of democracy that now are bearing fruit throughout Europe. Many of these heroes and patriots have gone to their final rest; but their service, their sacrifice, and their achievements will live forever in the memories and hearts of their fellow Americans.

The Congress by House Joint Resolution 65, has authorized and requested the President to issue a proclamation honoring the veterans of the Battle of the Bulge.

Now, Therefore, I, William J. Clinton, President of the United States of America, do hereby proclaim the period of December 16, 1999, to January 25, 2000, as a time to commemorate the 55th anniversary of the Battle of the Bulge. I call upon the people of the United States to express our profound gratitude to the veterans of the Battle of the Bulge and to honor them with appropriate programs, ceremonies, and activities.

In Witness Whereof, I have hereunto set my hand this sixteenth day of December, in the year of our Lord nineteen hundred and ninety-nine, and of the Independence of the United States of America the two hundred and twenty-fourth.

William J. Clinton

[Filed with the Office of the Federal Register, 10:59 a.m., December 20, 1999]

NOTE: This proclamation will be published in the *Federal Register* on December 21.

Proclamation 7262—Wright Brothers Day, 1999

December 16, 1999

By the President of the United States of America

A Proclamation

We stand at a rare moment in human history: the end of a century and the birth of